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### Deleuze and collaborative writing

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**Title:** Deleuze and collaborative writing: Responding to/with 'JKSB'

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**Abstract:** In this paper, the authors respond to *Deleuze and collaborative writing: An immanent plane of composition* (Wyatt et al, 2011). The book's authors ('JKSB') and two discussants (Elizabeth St. Pierre and Norman Denzin) consider questions such as: what does this book open up? How might it help us to think differently (e.g. about inquiry, about collaboration, about the ethics of reading and writing in such an assemblage)? And how does it contribute to the growing literature on collaborative writing as method of inquiry?

**Key words:** collaborative writing, inquiry, Deleuze, assemblage

***Deleuze and collaborative writing: Responding to 'JKSB'***

This paper, and the book it responds to, *Deleuze and Collaborative Writing: An Immanent Plane of Composition*, has many histories.

It has a history that can be traced in *chronos*.

It has a history of the present that always begins in the middle and exists in *aeon*.

It has a history in assemblage that is rhizomatic, fluid, transmutational, nomadic, vectoral and always on the move in the continuously shifting interstices of materiality and discourse. JKSB described one of the beginnings in the book that we are responding to now, in this paper, in this way:

“Two of us (Jonathan and Ken in the UK) had been writing together on a collaborative doctorate, and had drawn on the collective biography methodology that another two of us (Bronwyn and Susanne in Australia) had developed (Davies & Gannon 2006 and 2009). Responding to a suggestion from Norman Denzin, that the JK assemblage extend itself into the field of Deleuze and collaborative writing for the purposes of presenting a symposium at the 2009 International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (IQI), JK reassembled themselves with Bronwyn and Susanne to become *the JKSB Deleuze and collaborative writing assemblage—JKSB for short.*” (Wyatt et al, 2011, p. 4, italics in the original)

We are curious about what that book provokes. At the 9<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI) JKSB met as part of a panel to present, discuss and critically engage with the book. We invited Norman Denzin, Maggie MacLure, Elizabeth St. Pierre and Jane Speedy to act as discussants. Jane and Maggie were unable to attend the

Congress and so at 1pm on Saturday 18 May, 2013 the six of us gathered in Room 314B of the Illini Building and waited with anticipation and a degree of trepidation as the room gradually filled with fellow Congress participants.

What follows in this paper is the collection of papers in the order that we each presented them in the panel: JKSB, Norman, Bettie. Unfortunately, we have no record of the discussion that followed the reading of the papers: we hope that this re-assembling of our papers will re-kindle elements of that conversation and take it forward to create the moments and movements of many new histories of and in Deleuze and collaborative writing.

### **Response to JKSB #1: JKSB**

JKSB, as we came to know ourselves while we wrote this book, was an *assemblage*, specifically not the sum of separately existing identities. In approaching each other through and with Deleuze we did not keep or defend our separate boundaries. We immersed ourselves in our collaborative task of writing *in relation*, opening our ears, our eyes, our breath, our words, to the lives of each other. And coming to life in the space of that hearing/seeing/breathing, we came to know our own selves differently, to know, in that assemblage, an intensity that more than once bowled one or other of us over.

Our openness to the affective as well as the conceptual interactive work we were doing opened each of our on-going lives to new becomings in the space of the other. Selves come to exist, and go on coming into existence, through the other. This is not just a feature of our work, we suggest, but an elaboration of the human condition.

Drawing on Bergson (1998), Deleuze understands the ongoing differentiation of co-implicated selves as necessary for the creative evolution of life. While repetition and sameness is what humans are mostly attracted to, and depend on, in the mundane existence of our everyday lives, it is openness to the not-yet-known that Deleuze argues they must dare to forge.

The collaborative daring we engaged in here, is what the book lays bare. We explored through our writing to each other what Deleuze called an immanent plane of composition, where the complex multiplicities of our singular beings was manifest at the same time as we explored our shared existence as part of the same Being. Shared and therefore messy. As Jane Speedy wrote of J and K's nomadic work together: "Dust storms. I anticipated dust storms from the outset" (in Gale, Speedy & Wyatt, 2010, p. 23).

In speaking and writing and listening to and hearing each other we faced this challenge: to speak and to hear the intensities and multiple specificities of the other, knowing them at the same time as dimensions of the same Being we were each part of. Such a challenge was exciting, exhilarating and sometimes terrifying. And one that defies the ways we usually think about ourselves in our separation, bounded by our skin, a closed book in some fundamental way to the other since only we, we assume, can know and experience what it means to be me. It also challenges the multiple binaries through which we think self and other, human and non-human, theory and practice, ontology and epistemology.

Instead of exploring Deleuze as an abstract set of propositions we brought his concepts to life in our collaborating bodies and our unfolding engagements with life in its specificity—and in its Being. We sought to unleash the creative voice of matter in our

engagement in the JKSB assemblage.

**Bronwyn:** *The image of the rhizome and the recuperation of trees as metaphor for our work*

...unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature... It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows... (it) operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoot... it has multiple entryways and its own lines of flight. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 23)

When Deleuze and Guattari rejected trees as an adequate metaphor for thought, it was clearly a stereotypical northern hemisphere tree they had in mind. They weren't thinking about Australian trees. Mangroves, for example, live in water, and their roots rise up into the air for breath. Fig trees dangle roots down from their branches, building a rampart of multiple trunks and roots that support the initial trunk and perhaps eventually abandon it. They grow glorious buttress roots to support their massive weight, and their roots twine round rocks and other trees to gain a sufficient purchase for their massive weight in the sandy soil. Strangler or Cathedral figs use another fig as their host, enlacing and encasing the host until eventually the host vanishes. The ensuing tree is a vast lacy tube that does not soar upright like an oak or an elm, but haphazardly lurches sideways, finding another tree to lean on.





For me, as an Australian, these beautiful and chaotic trees come closer to what we did than, say, a potato or the root of a ginger plant—typical rhizomes. We leaned and we lurched. We put unbearable weight on each other. We supported each other. We encircled one another, making a stable base out of a solid foundation that then disappeared. Our roots grew down, and up and around. We grew roots out of our branches. Which tree was which—the question no longer made sense.

**Jonathan – *Place and space (Saturday 26 January 2013)***

It is the first sun, albeit weak and pale, we have seen this year. It penetrates the train's dusty window as I travel south-east from Oxford this early Saturday morning, and I have to squint to read on my screen how Bronwyn has kicked off our writing about JKSB for this session. It's cold and I still have on my blue scarf, the scarf Bronwyn gave me on her recent visit to our home in Abingdon. Across the aisle, a mother reads in a language I don't recognize – but it could be Polish – to her adorable small daughter, whose pink-socked feet are folded under her and whose suede, white-furred boots, tiny as mice, sit lonely on the floor. In twenty minutes my train will arrive at Godalming station, and I shall walk the ten minutes up the hill to the town centre to meet my mother and sister. I haven't seen them for a month.

This is a moment like one of those in JKSB: like when Ken would write from the beach in Cornwall, or Bronwyn in Florence, or Sue in the desert. Or when I sat watching a baby laugh in its pushchair in a café in Abingdon. This, now, is a moment like that, a *haecceity*, emblematic of the best of my JKSB collaborative writing experience, as we worked – no, it wasn't 'work' – as we played with writing through and in between each other and Deleuze.

We brought the geographer in Deleuze alive, it seems to me. Deleuze the traveler. The explorer.

**Susanne – *Dust storms (Saturday 30 March 2013)***

I want to return to the desert, another desert. To dust storms and the precarious and unstable grounds of collaboration.





Before I come back to the desert, I want to turn again to the assemblage and to some of what Deleuze says about collaboration. We began with the “JKSB assemblage” that wrote this book. And the assemblage is not a fixed, static or bounded entity. It is its connections, its multiplicities, and it is always already, inevitably, on the move. This might be apparent in the molecular detail of spaces, places, bodies, and affects in our accounts of where and what and who in each moment where we reach towards each other in these flows of words. Assemblages, including JKSB, are by their nature unstable. More important, and more interesting than any assemblage in itself, is the movement of affects and desire that can be mapped through an assemblage as it dissolves, disassembles, and reassembles in new formations. Some of these movements are evident

in our text, though some remain outside it. Perhaps assemblages begin to dissolve or dissipate in the very moment of their inauguration.

The instability of the JKSB assemblage is marked in the text where JKB, JK and B are assigned to different plateaus. Even so, where B writes of collaborative writing in Plateau Five, beyond any B inhabiting the body that taps the keyboard or takes up a pen to write, this B is just one component of an assemblage. It includes Colebrook reading Deleuze, Badiou reading Deleuze (Badiou, 2000), B reading Deleuze and reading Colebrook reading Deleuze and B reading Badiou reading D and many others named and unnamed including various configurations of JKSB and traces of the molecular becomings of J in a taxi in Kilifi, S waking in the desert, K drinking Fundador in Barcelona, B crying in an opera in Firenze. All these others, and non-human and non-organic others, are also part of the text. In the book we aimed for the sort of conversation where “something is produced which doesn’t belong to [any one of] us...No longer is it ‘x explains x, signed x’ but ...‘x explains y, signed z’...multiply the sides, break every circle in favour of the polygons” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 14).

The final plateau of the book suggests that our strategy of “keeping separate voices” has helped to keep some of “the problems we pose for each other visible”, and has “kept difference alive in the text” (JKSB, 2011, p. 33). We take some of our cues from Deleuze who says of his writing collaboration with Guattari, as J and K have also said of their extensive work together: “we do not work together, we work between the two;” Deleuze continues “We were never in the same rhythm, we were always out of step...He understood what I said to him immediately, too quickly for my liking – he was already elsewhere” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 13). We were often out of rhythm, at

least one of us already elsewhere. Not always returning, but always there. We might consider, there being four of us - or three or two or even apparently 'one' – that at best, we were more like a sort of Deleuzian 'gang' for this book: as “each goes about his (sic) own business, each brings in his loot and a becoming is sketched out – a 'bloc' starts moving – which no longer belongs to anyone, but is between everyone” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 7).

But I'd like to return to the desert. The desert that we are reminded of in the opening to this paper, the desert storms that Jane anticipated for JK when they wrote together. Although I know the tropics that Bronwyn has evoked, I also come from semi-desert, where, during droughts, storms lift tons of topsoil into the air. When we saw the dust rising on the horizon we would scatter to close every louvre and window, block the gaps beneath the doors, bring the washing in off the line, and move the car, before the red dirt dropped on us. If you were caught outside you'd have to squeeze your eyes tight, turn your back to the wind, and close your mouth because it's impossible to speak when your mouth is full of dust. This too, was part of our experience, part of the time.

We are each, to borrow from Deleuze, “deserts,... populated by tribes, flora and fauna...all these clans, all these crowds, do not undermine the desert, which is our very ascesis; on the contrary they inhabit it, they pass through it, over it.” The desert, he goes on to explain, is “experimentation on oneself, [it] is our only identity, our single chance for all the combinations which inhabit us” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 9). Despite the desert, despite dust storms, despite our various withdrawals, and the constant movements of desire and affect through the volatile relational assemblage that we called 'JKSB', there are flashes of light and beauty.



**Ken:** *'All he remembers is all that remains'*<sup>1</sup> (April 2013)

Susanne says of the JKSB writing: 'there are flashes of light and beauty': I will try to stay with those .....

I have been sitting on this for a long time. I have been unable to deal with it. I have tried to expunge it from what I see as the bodily remains of JKSB. This morning I read Susanne's message and was impressed that she had read our book again.

I loved your writing Susanne; I love the frantic joy that emanates from your body through the literacies of your writing; my connections with your words are imbued with viscosity: I love the force with which I can dispatch discourse to the bin.

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<sup>1</sup> Barker & Grose, 2006

I have been struggling with writing.

.....

There is an east wind blowing across the sea; it is intensely cold, there is no respite, it is living here. I could not write and so today I walked. I walked for hours. On the beach. The sky is grey, the wind finds its way into every crevice, every silent hole in my clothing. I foraged for seaweed and collected two big bags: this is good for my garden. Seaweed is rich in nutrients and it has the patience to slow release them into my garden.

A weak sun attempted to make claims upon the sky and around 6.30 in the evening I gave up. Clouds, clouds, clouds. My body shivered. I humped my bursting bags of seaweed into the boot of my car and walked to the pub. I knew what I was going to do. I ordered a pint, sat on a sofa near the fire, put on my glasses, pulled our book out of my shoulder bag and read. I sat in the warmth of that quiet pub and read for two hours: it seemed like minutes. I didn't read it all but I was immersed. This reading immersed me in the JKSB assemblage in a way that I haven't been since I put the book down all those years/months ago.

I read our play: I felt joyful remembering of us all sitting by the fountain, near the Art Institute in Chicago, reading together for the first time, remembering the glistening light, remembering my tears of joy as we read and lived like young lovers in intense intimacy.

I read our sea stories and I have loved Bronwyn's evocation of St. Ives, of the light over the sea at Whitsands, of my own connections with fisherman and miners, of conversations in pubs that tear my heart from its fragile rootings. I read the gap between

the joy of her first visit and Bronwyn's account of her own second visit and I shiver at what is next to come.

I read Jonathan's stories of Kenya and remember being released through the writing, feeling 'washed again, feeling the sense of flowing in benign currents, happy to go with the ebb and flow, enjoying the imagery ...' of the writing shared.

.....

'All he remembers is all that remains.'

It was writing. As I think of the JKSB writing, this phrase from Deleuze keeps returning: 'But the stick tool is itself a deterritorialised branch ...' (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 134). And so, it was writing that lived as event; not an ordered series of writings, it was writings becoming in their intensive multiplicities. It was writing that in its process was the becoming of those engaged in writing it. Writing as events, that, bringing together in collectivity, saw the emergence of assemblage. In that bringing together assemblage was given a name 'JKSB'. In its indication of 'Jonathan', 'Ken', 'Susanne' and 'Bronwyn', that name seemed to retain elusiveness and be effective in not identifying or in giving meaning; it seemed to work in transversality and slippage. Perhaps it still does.

It was writing that somehow lived in actuality, writing that lived on pages, was read on screens and dispatched through e-mail in and to the assemblage called 'JKSB'. It was writing that somehow lived in virtuality, yet lived in actualities, having multiple existences in the moods, intensities and particularities of space.



It was writing that somehow became an object called a book; a book recognizable in book assemblage, existent with other books, papers and collections, on shelves and desks, books recognizable through signification: 'Deleuze', 'Guattari', 'collaboration', 'writing' and so on.

It was writing that found him singing that refrain, over and over again, 'All he remembers is all that remains' ... 'All he remembers is all that remains' ... Then he found himself writing over and over again. It was writing, writing which, in memory, re/collection and its remaining, seems to live in the distant objectivity of substance and materiality more than in the delirious intensity of living in frantic moments of self and the not yet known. In the living movement of this distanced corporeality he stops, trying to make sense of these endless repetitions, he tries to capture a moment in the facile mirroring of reflection and he is flooded with hallucinations of difference.

.....

He sees the captured shimmering iridescence of the image on its cover, he feels the smooth shiny texture of that cover, he picks up the book and, carelessly opening it, for a brief moment, like a drunken lover, stoops and buries his face and basks in the olfactory intensity of its pages. In his withdrawal he realises the promiscuity of his actions and this time, with reason taking over from sense and with purpose and hesitation, he opens its pages again. Again he reads sentences, paragraphs, a small part of a chapter; his focus becomes blurred. Spivak's questioning (1988) looms in his vision: do writers have the right to speak for subjects in writing their lives? Can the subject's story be heard in the writer's representation of it? These questions remind him of something Susanne said to

us all in a recent e-mail: 'a book (is) something that circulates away from its authors (though that then begs the question of why its authors would speak for it now).

'All he remembers is all that remains'

### **Response to JKSB #2: Norman K. Denzin**

Jonathan writes:

"The four of us have written together since last ... summer, exchanging writings across the ether .. Ken and me in UK and Bronwyn and Sue in ... Out of these tangled lines we have fashioned a play in 4 acts ... (Wyatt, et. al., 2011, p. 25).

Deleuze writes:

"One's always writing to bring something to life, to free life from where it's trapped, to trace lines of flight (1995, p. 141)).

Bronwyn:

"Collaborative writing is

Dangerous ...

is to be co-implicated with the other

to be present

to be assailed by thoughts ...

to be singular to exist in the space of writing with

(Wyatt et al, 2011, p. 130-31)

In my old reading group in the 1980s we read *Anti-Oedipus* (1977) and tried to figure out capitalism and schizophrenia, Then we read *A Thousand Plateaus* (2004) and gave up. Then last week I read *Deleuze & Collaborative Writing*, and it all started to make sense. But there had to be more to it because *Deleuze & Collaborative Writing* had very little, if anything, to say about politics, madness or capitalism. Whose genealogy shall I follow?

### **In the Beginning**

In the beginning of the narrative and performance turn in the human disciplines there was *biography*, and autobiography; writers writing about writers, writers writing about themselves. Some of these writers wrote ethnographies, accounts about the ways of life of the writer and those written about. Then there was *performance*, the understanding that people (writers) perform culture, through their interpretive [writing] practices (Conquergood, 1985).

Instead of an “ensemble of texts, a repertoire of performance practices became the backbone of this counterculture where politics was played, danced and acted, as well as sung and sung about ... because words were never enough to communicate the unsayable” (Gilroy, 1991, p. 37). *Autoethnography* inserted itself in the picture when it was understood that all ethnographers reflexively (or un-reflexively) write themselves into their ethnographies. There is *no* objective space outside the text. This is the space of critical performance [auto]ethnography, the space of Conquergood’s triad of triads, the intersection of imagination, activism, and civic struggle, the space of Madison’s performative acts of activism (2012).

### **Writing Together--Duoethnography: A Dialogical Space**

Terms flow together, intermingle; a montage of overlapping projects, images, voices, techniques. Duoethnography. collaborative autoethnography, collective biography, and *collaborative writing*—alone, together, voices seeking a home. Two or more persons writing together move Madison's acts of activism into a liminal dialogical space.

Duoethnographers merge their writing selves, into a multi-voiced performance text (Gale, Pelias, Russell, Spry, & Wyatt, 2013, p. 165)). The writing surges and flows, a to-ing and fro-ing, fingers poised over keys, eyes on screens, writers writing back and forth, co-producing performance narratives, collective biographies, telling (and writing) intersecting life stories, doing co-performances, laughing and joking, hugging, laughing, crying (Gale, Pelias, Russell, Spry & Wyatt, 2013, p. 166; Norris & Sawyer, 2012; Davies & Gannon, 2006):

“We can't press the keys at the same time. But this introduction and the entire book are ours. Equally ours. Even as I type this sentence, 2000 miles away from my writing partner I know that these words, meanings, intentions, and emotions reside not in me but in us ... After a few attempts at keeping the story straight, we gave in and embraced the exhilarating experience of co-constructing a book together” (Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 13).

Definitions: one long word, no hyphens:

*Duoethnographycollaborativeautoethnographycollectivebiographcollaborativewriting.*

A family of terms slip and slide, fall over one another: critical, embodied, transformative, dialogic, reflexive, participatory, emancipatory, narratives of resistance,

plateaus, planes of composition, Deleuze, Guattari, assemblages, affect, nomadic inquiry, rhizomatic, love, loss, praxis writing as a way of being in the world.

Writing together, autoethnographers (duoethnographers) create a shared performance space potentially framed around acts of activism and resistance. Writers write themselves into each other's life, sharing identities, co-producing a critical consciousness, imagining new politics of possibility. Readers are invited to think and talk their way into the performance, to enter the conversation, to challenge, contest, create a dialogue (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, pp. 10-11).

The method of *curere*, like Sartre's regressive and progressive method, works from the past to the present, moving back and forth in time, unraveling and interpreting a life as it makes itself visible as a universal singular. In this case there are two (or more) lives, moving forward and backward.

Duoethnographies, like reflexive autoethnographies, are disruptive, emergent, dialogic, transformative narratives. They are truthful fictions, critiquing the relationship between the personal, the political and the historical. They embody a communitarian ethics of care, a relational ethics that values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness, a world-making ethic that begins with the self-in-relation with others (Ellis 2009, p. 308; Wyatt, Gale, Gannon & Davies, 2011, p. 109).

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Clearly this discourse is not standing still. Writing selves are performing new writing practices, blurring fact and fiction, challenging the dividing line between biography, history, writing, autobiography, memory, performer, performed, observer and

observed. This is the space where biography intersects with history, politics and culture. Collaborative autoethnography re-tells and re-performs these life experiences as they intersect in these sites. The story becomes an invention, a re-presentation, an historical object often ripped or torn out of its contexts and recontextualized in the spaces and understandings of the story.

In writing I create the conditions for rediscovering the meanings of a past sequence of events (Ulmer, 1989, p. 211). In so doing, I create new ways of performing, honoring and experiencing the past. History becomes a montage, a blur of painful images. Listen to Tami Spry who writes that after she lost her son in childbirth

“Things fell apart. The shadowlands of grief became my unwanted field of study. ... After losing our son in childbirth, writing felt like the identification of body parts, as if each described piece of the experience were a cumbersome limb that I could snap off my body and lay upon the ground.” (2006, pp. 340–41)

Davies and Gannon describe their collective biography project:

“Throughout all these chapters we write and reflect on moments of being, on the ambivalent, slippery subject-in-process – as infant, schoolgirl, writer, teacher, professor, student, lover, wife, daughter/mother -- captured in the remembered *moment of being*, transformed in a process of telling and writing and reading that *moves* us in a variety of ways. These moments and movements are not towards the transformation of ourselves into new subjects in linear time. Rather, the transformation lies in a particular form of attention to the remembered moment, an attention that makes the subject’s vulnerability to discursive power starkly visible while making visible the constitutive powers of the subject-in-process.”

(2006, p. x, italics in original)

Collaborative writing is about writers being present in the moment, writing from the soul, constructing a space where selves flow together, being vulnerable, pushing always for connections between personal troubles and public issues. Here in the moment of the present, writers interrogate that space where praxis intersects with pedagogy. Here in the now of the present a radical politics of possibility is made visible.

### **Response to JKSB #3: Elizabeth St. Pierre: The Ethics of Reading and Writing in Assemblage**

As I read this lovely book (Wyatt, Gale, Gannon & Davies, 2011) in which the authors attempted to give up, to lose, the habitual individuation of the humanist subject that is always imposed on us, that self, that individual forced on us with the grammar of our language, with every personal pronoun—especially the “I” we come to believe is real, I thought about collaborations that might be possible. In another paper (St.Pierre, in press) about collaborative writing, I focused on why I don’t like to write with other people, why I’m leery of the romance of collaboration. As I explained in that paper, I’ve studied composition theories for many years and know that the call for collaboration in writing emerged with the larger social turn in the 1970s in an approach to theorizing and teaching composition called *the writing process*. In the structure of writing process theory, *collaboration* is imbricated with other concepts I’m also leery of such as *dialogue* and *consensus*. To me, the concept collaboration assumes the humanist subject, because to think collaboration as typically described one must assume there are separate writers who exist in advance of writing who can come together to collaborate, to write a text together. I wonder if one can think collaboration without the humanist subject? I’m not

sure the word *collaboration* works for me anymore, bringing along with it as it does that lumbering, ponderous, weighty, intentional writer who exists ahead of the text, the author, the proper name.

The social turn also enabled a theoretical and pedagogical approach to reading called *reader response theory* that claims each reader responds differently to a text and that the idea of an intentional author who can write clearly and precisely enough to transmit his meaning to any reader is simply not what happens in reading and writing. In reader response theory, meaning is not buried in the text for a discerning, well-trained reader to uncover. Instead, meaning is made in the transaction between the text and the reader. I think reading is much more complicated than that, but reader response theory is certainly useful on the way to poststructural theories of language and the subject, which I like to think about.

Perhaps because I'm always an English teacher, I immediately thought of writing process theory and reader response theory when Bronwyn asked me to comment on how the book, *Deleuze and Collaborative Writing* (Wyatt, Gale, Gannon & Davies, 2011) opens up a space for thinking differently. I thought of those two theories because one could certainly use them to describe the work of the book, where one author writes something; another reads and writes back; another reads and responds to both responses, and so on. But the book is not so simple, and it provoked me to think about collaboration differently yet again.

The space the book opened up for me is a highly charged space that demands different descriptions of reading and writing as well as a different *ethics* if one is to move away from the reader/writer binary opposition into some different linguistic-material



configuration. Though we don't often think of reading and writing as ethical practices, I believe they are and *must be* in that new configuration that might be something like Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) *assemblage*. But the reading and writing in that space that is always folding and refolding can't be described in advance so that one can be prepared to be ethical, whether one is the writer or the reader, if we must maintain that distinction.

I assume that writers are writing for readers (both would be elements of the assemblage) and that, often, we don't know who the reader(s) will be. How can writers, then, be in ethical relations with readers in assemblage? Spivak (1993) suggested how responsibility, and ethics, might contribute to the breakdown between the writer and her audience, the reader, in the following long quotation:

“When an audience is responsible, responding, invited, in other words to coinvestigate, then positionality is shared with it. Audience and investigator: it's not just a binary opposition when an audience really is an audience. It now seems to me that many of the changes I've made in my position are because the audience has become a coinvestigator and I have realized what it is to have an audience. An audience is part of one. An audience shows one something. That may indeed be the transaction. It's a responsibility to the other taking on faces. It is not deessentializing, but attempting to deconstruct the binary opposition between investigator and audience. Radically, then, one works not for a future present, but imagining the blank certitude of the future anterior. And the audience *is* the unimaginable . . . responding, responsible, and invited to be coinvestigator [and] one starts owning the right to have one's invitation accepted, given that the invitation is, like all letters, open letters intercepted and that people turn up in

other places for other occasions with that invitation, so that we begin to deconstruct that binary opposition bit by bit.” (pp. 22-23)

So we could think of writing as sending out an invitation to an unimaginable but responsible audience who might accept our invitation, show us something, and join us so that the binary of writer/reader is gradually deconstructed. I think here of Foucault's (1984) words about the author, “In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is, rather, a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears” (p. 102)—has always already disappeared in the ethical relation of assemblage.

Thomas Keenan (1997) helps us think about the ethics and responsibility of reading (if we maintain the writer/reader distinction). He wrote as follows:

“By “reading” I mean our exposure to the singularity of a text, something that cannot be organized in advance, whose complexities cannot be settled or decided by “theories” or the application of more or less mechanical programs. Reading, in this sense, is what happens when we cannot apply the rules. This means that reading is an experience of responsibility, but that responsibility is not a moment of security or of cognitive certainty. Quite the contrary: the only responsibility worthy of the name comes with the removal of grounds, the withdrawal of the rules or the knowledge on which we might rely to make our decision for us. No grounds means no alibis, no elsewhere to which we might refer the instance of our decision.” (p. 1)

So if one is to read and write responsibly and ethically as Spivak and Keenan described, perhaps one must come to that work unprepared to write or read as “I,”

unprepared for the assault and the embrace of words that just keep on coming, one after the other after the other as words do; unprepared for the confusion and the lure of words, for the slippage of those words, for slipping and falling into language, for losing oneself, losing the “I”—for becoming imperceptible. That might be the ethical space of this different reading and writing in assemblage—of being unprepared for this different ethics, this necessary ethics of disappearing into language in its materiality in assemblage.

Can one “collaborate” in that ethical space of this different writing and reading? Can one give up authorship and no longer claim one’s words? Can the humanist subject, the “proper name” disappear, be folded into the interiority of that space? Are we willing to give up that subject, *really* give up our proper names? Deleuze and Guattari (2004) wrote about how they wrote together the book, *A Thousand Plateaus*. They explained that “Each morning we would wake up, and each of us would ask himself what plateau he was going to tackle, writing five lines here, ten there” (p. 24). How would that work, I wonder? Could they recognize their own sentences later? Could Deleuze say, “I wrote those five sentences, and Felix wrote those.” Or did they “reach the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I”? (p. 3). Would that be something like a Deleuzian collaboration—the disappearance of the “I,” the author, the proper name? What ethics would that kind of collaboration require?

So back to Bronwyn’s question that led me down this path—Did our book, *Deleuze and Collaborative Writing*, open up a space for you to think differently? I would say, yes, it did. It helped me affirm that, for me, reading and writing are always already

collaborative but not in the conventional sense. And it helped me think more about the ethics of reading and writing in assemblage.

The book is, indeed, a provocation. When I think about what it must have been like to wake up in the morning and read someone's response to words you'd sent out the day before, I'm left with questions that I can't answer but that I like to think on. For example, what happens if your words are not taken up as you'd hoped, if they're simply dropped, or if they're mangled? How disappointed will you be? Will you shift into an analysis of your failure to "write" or her failure to "read"? How much work do you expect of your audience? What's the responsibility of the reader to "get it" in assemblage?

What happens if the ordinary happens and you find yourself re-subjected, made again into an individual writer writing? Suppose you're blocked from following a line of flight, from a rhizomatic becoming by just one word, *one word* like "I" that immediately re-installs the old ontology and its proper names? Do you stop and teach? Do you insist your collaborators read this or that book so you can all continue writing collaboratively in the middle?

And what if the miracle of writing happens, if the words you sent out are extended and then folded into a flurry of startling intensities, a delirious blossoming of wild profusion? How joyous will you be in that delicious movement? How much pleasure can you bear?

And how does one *become* in such work? How does one exist when one is no longer weighed down by "I," when reading and writing have collapsed all the "I's" we

thought were real? What is this fearsome, wondrous, ethical space of reading and writing that enables a different living? How can it happen?

I have no answers to these questions, but this provocative book and these writers writing encouraged them. One thing I've learned to trust is that reading and writing are always already entangled with living and will take us someplace if we just press on.

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